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ABSTRACT

Designed to identify and describe the key challenges facing community colleges as a result of major changes in the social, economic, and demographic make-up of students and service areas, this paper combines information gathered from two national environmental scanning groups, a review of the literature, and input from educational professionals. The 10 community college issues discussed are as follows: (1) increasingly diverse service areas and student populations; (2) growing numbers of academically underprepared students; (3) an unclear workforce agenda for the information age; (4) the need to ensure and provide evidence of institutional effectiveness; (5) the need to improve college governance by developing boards of trustees that have vision and purpose; and are goal-driven, unified, supported by inspired leadership, and politically astute; (6) the need to promote organizational wellness through environmental scanning, broadened redefinition of college purpose, emphasis on quality, and concern for employee and public opinions; (7) an impending faculty shortage and the aging of the existing faculty; (8) the need for a resurgence of campus collegiality; (9) the impact of external forces, including business people, lay citizens, and legislators, on college governance and decision making; and (10) the role of ethics in institutional management and curriculum. Each topic section concludes with a series of specific questions to initiate further discussion. (GFW)

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The Top Ten Issues Facing America's Community Colleges

1991 Edition

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Our focus is change.
Our business is creating strategic advantage.
Our goal is preferred tomorrows.

At The Institute for Future Studies at Macomb Community College...
We believe we can help people and organizations change the boundaries of their ideas.
We believe we can help people develop perspectives that are broader and deeper.
And we believe there are endless options for building better tomorrows.

All this is possible—we believe—because of a uniquely human quality called thinking.

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Dr. William J. Banach, Executive Director.

Designed to stimulate thinking and encourage reasoned initiatives,
the **Strategic Advantage Series** addresses significant societal issues.

The Top Ten Issues Facing America's Community Colleges

Foreword

This is the second edition of *The Top Ten Issues Facing America's Community Colleges.* It takes its place alongside a companion publication titled *The Top Ten Educational Issues* (facing America's public schools), now in its twelfth year.

The issues presented in this document are the product of input from two national environmental scanning groups formed by The Institute for Future Studies at Macomb Community College. In addition we analyze material scanned by others, solicit the opinions of working professionals, and monitor a variety of print material.

Our intent is to identify issues and encourage public discussion of them. In fact, the quick-hitting format of the publication was specifically designed to raise questions and stimulate dialogue.

We believe that any forum for inquiry will result in new perspectives. We also believe open exchange will pave the way for creative responses to the opportunities we'll discover on our journey into the future.

In addition to updating and re-emphasizing several previously identified issues, this year's *Top Ten* document advances some new thoughts. The format begins with a presentation of the issue, and ends with a list of starter questions (and sometimes dilemmas or paradoxes) which deserve discussion and debate.

Our goal is to present the issue and stimulate the development of insight. But because solutions are situational and personal, the task of assessing the potential impact of an issue and the means for processing it at the institutional level must be left to the reader.

It's our desire to be part of the dialogue we stimulate, just as we want you to be part of the issues we develop. We invite your reaction, suggestions, insights and ideas. And we encourage you to send us information about any issue which you believe has potential for impacting America's community colleges.

At Macomb Community College, we are focused on strengthening the quality of our staff, our students and our thinking. We have a vision, a process and a plan. We are committed to serving our community. And, we seek the advantage an anticipatory mindset can provide our institution in an increasingly competitive environment.

Your dialogue on the issues will raise the agenda for education and help all of us build better tomorrows. Please immerse yourself in the issues and share your thinking with us.

Albert L. Lorenzo, President
Macomb Community College

William J. Banach, Executive Director
The Institute for Future Studies

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Diversity Plus

Alvin Toffler told us change is the only constant . . . twenty years ago! His words had the effect of cold water in the face, and led many to brace for rapid change.

Today, however, we face *radical* change. While you can run faster to keep up with rapid change, that strategy no longer works. Radical change modifies the rules and, hence, changes the game.

In these unprecedented times, organizational thinkers will move from being planners to becoming pathfinders.

Changes over the past twenty years have not been smooth and linear. Rather we have experienced radical change which has been fueled by new social attitudes, global interaction and dependency, technological leaps forward, and a growing realization of limits. These changes have triggered shifts in organizational purpose, abandonment of old practices, the need for innovation and experimentation, and created confusion over the right cause to follow.

Last year our list of *The Top Ten Issues Facing America's Community Colleges* was headed by an issue we titled "Diverse Footprints." This year we expand on the issue and underline its importance by renaming it "Diversity Plus."

Our community profiles *are* becoming more diverse. What flies in Boston can't get off the ground in Los Angeles. And, what plays in Peoria can't attract an audience in Tallahassee.

That's why the two-year colleges in these communities shouldn't look like one another. While they subscribe to the core beliefs underlying the community college concept, these institutions should look more like their communities than one another. And, since communities are destined to become more diverse, community colleges are destined to become even more dissimilar.

There is a paradox which accompanies radical change. While it's important for community colleges to share issues and insights, strategies and responses must be situational and personal. Increasingly, the ability of one community college to borrow ideas from another is diminishing. Increasingly, community college leaders will find themselves at a frontier where there are no guideposts. Increasingly, community colleges will be left alone to focus on harmony between marketplace and mission. In these unprecedented times, organizational thinkers will move from being planners to becoming pathfinders.

The common denominator is that all community colleges must respond to the needs of their marketplace. The paradox is that the method and degree of response may be as diverse as the communities in which our two-year institutions are located.

— Over —

Leaving diverse footprints on the path to excellence requires that our two-year institutions:

1. Develop vision, mission and goals which are consistent with the social purposes for which community colleges were created;
2. Alter programming to meet the changing needs of customers within a changing environment; and,
3. Maintain a network for sharing ideas, issues and insights.

Radical change is making our two-year colleges more dissimilar. It is, in fact, this growing diversity which dictates that we learn to work together . . . so we can work more effectively alone.

Discussion Initiators

- ❑ What is the demographic, economic and political profile of your institution's service area?
- ❑ Which community characteristics have changed most dramatically in the past five years?
- ❑ How has your institution tailored its programming to the profile and changes identified above?
- ❑ What programs and services are obsolete as a result of changing community characteristics?
- ❑ Are you networking with any two-year institutions which have similar community characteristics and profiles?
- ❑ What is the next significant change that is likely to occur in your institution's service area?

Hetero*genius*

It doesn't take a genius to realize quality education is the key to a better tomorrow. In the workplace it's becoming painfully obvious that more schooling is the minimum standard for competitiveness. Employers are looking for people who can think, solve problems and work in teams. There is a premium on workers who are flexible, adaptable and willing to learn.

It has, in fact, become clear to large numbers of people that education is *the* ticket to a quality future. This realization is motivating them to stay in school and to return for advanced coursework. It is also producing an extremely heterogeneous student body.

One reality of the emphasis on education is that growing numbers of academically underprepared students are entering America's two-year institutions. While this gives testimony to the success of the open access vision embraced by our country's community colleges, it has produced the most diverse student body in the world. And, that is why this issue remains on the *Top Ten* list for another year.

The role of faculty must change from gatekeeper to guardian. Their job must not be to weed out students, but to help them succeed.

A significant number of today's community college students did not have "college prep" programs in high school. Many others are older adults for whom college is a new experience. Then there are those with rusty learning skills, and youngsters who wouldn't have been considered "college material" just a few years ago.

Open access and the changing nature of work have combined to create diversity in the classroom. Faculty increasingly enter their classrooms to face large disparities in ability, age and aspiration. Hence, meeting the individual needs of students can be a significant challenge.

Workplace demands and the need for an enlightened citizenry beg community colleges to respond to the heterogeneity of today's students and to help them succeed. The role of faculty must change from gatekeeper to guardian. Their job must not be to weed out students, but to help them succeed.

Community colleges, however, must carefully assess their capacity to adequately serve the underprepared student. Difficult as it may be, two-year institutions may have to identify a base-line ability level which triggers referral of students to other sources of assistance.

Serving learners of all ages, abilities and aspirations is a difficult assignment. Our two-year institutions must nurture the fragile factors which make the difference between giving up and getting through. The quality of life in America is directly dependent on our ability to address the task.

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Discussion Initiators

- ❑ What is the basic skill proficiency of entering students, and how has that changed in the past five years?
- ❑ On a scale of zero to 10, what kind of a job is your institution doing in student remediation and development?
- ❑ What is your institution's minimum proficiency level? (If you don't have one, should you?)
- ❑ Do prospective students understand the skill levels required for success in college?
- ❑ Does your institution provide feedback to area high schools on the success of their students? (Do you seek such feedback from institutions and employers who take your graduates?)

Workforce Strategy

One hundred years ago the average American was a 22-year-old white male who worked on the farm. He had a fifth grade education.

Fifty years ago the average American was a 29-year-old blue collar worker who toiled in our factories. He had a ninth grade education.

The agricultural and industrial eras in which these average Americans toiled had a common denominator: There were clear expectations for public education and a good fit between the needs of the workforce and the programming of the schools. One hundred years ago fundamental reading and basic computation skills sufficed. The industrial era demanded workers who were obedient, could handle routine work, didn't have to think too much and understood the importance of being on time. And so the schools stressed discipline, drill and practice, not questioning your elders and being in your seat " . . . by the time the bell rings." In short, public schools served American society well, and in the process became the most envied mass education system in the world.

Business has not, as yet, decided upon a dominant workforce strategy for the information age.

Today, however, the workplace agenda for education is not clear. One reason is that business has not, as yet, decided upon a dominant workforce strategy for the information age.

While it is clear that increased worker productivity results in increased economic growth and prosperity, it is generally unclear what kind of workforce the educational system should produce for the information era. The confusion is compounded by the shifting (and sometimes conflicting) strategies firms are using to cope with change.

Some firms still favor strategy one — crack the whip. These companies believe they could increase productivity (and hence prosperity) if only they had reliable and obedient employees who gave an honest day's work for an honest day's wage, " . . . just like we used to have." Industrial era education supports this strategy.

Some are employing strategy two — exporting work. Labor which used to be done in America is now simply exported to someplace beyond the third world. The goal is to cut labor costs. Workforce education is not a consideration for businesses on this track.

The third strategy is related to the application of technology, and it has three related tactics:

1. People can be replaced by machines (technology). This requires educating people to operate and repair machines.

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2. Workers can be deskilled so they and machines can work together. Often the employee assignment is to "Call us if the red light flashes." This requires educating the workforce to cope with boredom in the workplace.

3. Workers can use machines as tools which amplify human capacity. This tactic requires educational programming to upgrade the workforce.

Because all these strategies are now being used by American business, educators aren't sure where to direct their energies.

Educators know how to help students acquire a full range of skills. They can give people the power to facilitate or block . . . to initiate or react . . . to cope or change. And while it's contrary to educational values to lower the human agenda, it's also a gross injustice to prepare thinking workers for mechanical jobs.

Our schools *can* produce quality workers. Preparing the new age worker to do the job requires that corporate America tell American education the workforce strategy.

Discussion Initiators

- ❑ What is the demographic profile of students and workers in your community, and how is it likely to change?
- ❑ What is the business profile of your community, and how is it likely to change?
- ❑ What is your community's strategy for education and training?
- ❑ How do these strategies complement the needs of the global marketplace?
- ❑ How are you sharing the strategic options of the workplace with those enrolled in your institution?

Evidencing Effectiveness

Growth equates to success in the American culture. Big is better. Or so it went.

Across America public perceptions are changing. People *know* what constitutes quality in the products they buy and the cars they drive . . . and the schools they support. Big isn't necessarily better. Better is better!

And so for community colleges the focus must be quality. No longer are double-digit enrollment increases the norm for most two-year institutions. Gone are the clear agendas which accompanied rapid growth. The new, quality conscious marketplace is in command.

Inability to measure effectiveness against meaningful standards will create negative perceptions.

Community colleges — like other institutions — will have to demonstrate the quality they provide *and* they will have to present their explanations in ways that are understandable to all constituencies. In fact, our indicators of quality and evidence of effectiveness will have to be especially clear to the larger constituency which is not directly served by what we do.

Management guru Peter Drucker says the purpose of any human services organization is to bring about some change in a person or in society itself. That aptly summarizes most community college mission statements, and it provides an acid-test: Does the college succeed in helping people achieve the changes they desire? Across America, people are weighing resources allocated against results attained. If the results are poor, community colleges can expect public support to be the same.

In this new age, community colleges will have to define *and* document student success. Most are not prepared to accommodate either task very well because their measurement systems have been attuned only to indicators of *quantity*.

Inability to document effectiveness against meaningful standards will create negative perceptions. Negative perceptions, in turn, will lead to diminished reputation . . . which, in turn, will lead to legislative turbulence and diminished financial support . . . which, in turn, will lead to diminished quality . . . and so the cycle goes.

Our maturing information society has the capacity to identify quality indicators. Perhaps it won't be long before our educational institutions (and companies) have an "effectiveness index." Such an indicator will take on critical importance because it will affect a range of factors — from the subjectiveness of public perceptions to the objectiveness of institutional bond ratings.

There is an amplified charge toward accountability and payoff. Changes which lead to better quality are being championed by students, parents, and a host of advocate groups because the new winner's circle has no place for mediocrity.

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Discussion Initiators

- ❑ Do you have a system for measuring institutional effectiveness?
- ❑ Can your institution's performance be tied to its mission statement?
- ❑ Do your performance measures serve as a springboard for change?
- ❑ How do you share the effectiveness success stories within your institution? Within your community?

Beyond Limits

Some of society's most important work passes through the board room. It's here that dedicated citizen volunteers endeavor to fulfill education's promise.

But even the highest concept of volunteerism may be insufficient to lead in today's complex educational environment.

It is the rare (and profoundly disoriented) professional who claims to have all the answers. Yet, we expect lay board members elected at-large to have the wisdom to guide the educational enterprise.

Most people become trustees without prior experience on governing boards, with little knowledge of how people learn, and with a limited sense of the interrelationships and complexities of delivering instruction.

With every passing day, our system of governance is less up to the task.

With every passing day, our system of governance is less up to the task. It frustrates dedicated staff, entrepreneurial spirit and the trustees themselves. It is the reason the conversation turns to "the board" within five minutes of putting two or more college presidents behind closed doors.

Let there be no doubt that serving as a trustee is tough duty. But when the governance system can't keep abreast of change, can't understand the complexities of the enterprise, and can't comprehend the need for rapid marketplace response, things tend to get political.

And so administrative time becomes consumed by a superficial agenda. Real progress is sacrificed in the quest to seek simple explanations, to look good and to advance causes which — while they may be narrow is scope — have broad constituency appeal.

As this happens staff become disoriented and programs diversify without direction. Ultimately, instructional quality deteriorates, and student success becomes an unreachable objective.

Following are some key characteristics of winning board teams. Effective governance dictates that the board team have an honest discussion of how this list matches reality.

- Vision and purpose — Winning board teams have a written picture of the best that can be and they are resolved to work toward it.
- Goal driven — Winning board teams have written goals designed to move them in the direction of their vision.

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- Sense of togetherness — Members of the winning board team know and capitalize on one another's strengths.
- Inspired leadership — Winning board teams are characterized by high principle, big picture, future focused, can-do leaders.
- Leadership support — On winning board teams everyone supports the leader — privately, publicly, professionally.
- Political savvy — Winning board teams don't shoot anyone in the foot, including themselves.

Discussion Initiators

- ❑ How does your institution help keep volunteers from getting in over their heads?
- ❑ How comprehensive and honest is your orientation program for volunteers at all levels?
- ❑ When is the last time your institution's leaders had an honest dialog on the implications of change?
- ❑ How does your institution measure up to the characteristics of winning board teams?
- ❑ What one thing can you do in the next 30 days to help the governance system function more effectively?

Organizational Wellness

President Kennedy's call to "Ask not what your country can do for you . . . ." stimulated Americans to think of the bigger picture and the broader agenda. A paraphrase has implication for America's two-year institutions.

While they have focused on the well-being of staff, students and community, community colleges have expended little energy on themselves as organizations. This does not mean that the best interests of others should be set aside. Taking care of staff, student and community needs is critically important to the health of our two-year institutions. Now, however, it's time to move to the new plateau, and reflect on the health and well-being of our institutions themselves.

Community colleges must develop clear strategies to make the reality the perception.

The program announcement for this year's conference of the National Council for Staff, Professional and Organizational Development invited participants to " . . . make the quantum leap from focusing on staff development to addressing the organizational development issues of their educational institutions." In short, it is time to attend to the development of the organization — to assure that organizational wellness is a key consideration in our future planning.

We believe our new age has five characteristics which are impacting our organizations. Collectively they provide a frame for organizational development activities. Addressing them will enable us to assure the wellness of our people *and* our institutions:

1. The majority of forces triggering change are now external. Legislation, court decisions, and advances and discoveries across the globe have potential for directly or indirectly impacting our institutions. Now is the time to strengthen environmental scanning systems and engage in the thinking that leads to early and accurate anticipation of future needs.
2. Synthesis is replacing analysis as the framework for determining organizational purpose. Instead of studying their components more intently and perpetuating the past, community colleges must strive to redefine their purpose in the larger (global) social context.
3. Quality is replacing quantity as the principle measure of organizational effectiveness. Institutional attention should be refocused from enrollment to achievement, from opportunity to outcome, from product to performance, and from rhetoric to results.

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4. Employee attitudes are becoming more critical to effective organizational functioning. Organizational climate and institutional performance are mutually dependent. Improving the climate begins with *knowing* the climate.
5. Public opinion is having a more profound impact on organizational success. The perception *is* the reality. What the people think is infinitely more important than what actually is. Community colleges must develop clear strategies to make the reality the perception.

Discussion Initiators

- ❑ Who is responsible for the health and well-being of your institution?
- ❑ Is your institution's purpose likely to change during this decade?
- ❑ Do you have objective measures of your institution's health?
- ❑ What are some likely scenarios at your institution for the five characteristics of our new age?
- ❑ How can you simultaneously advance the well-being of your institution and your institution's people?

Double Dilemma

There are two ways to win. There are more ways to lose.

As is the case with many American institutions, community colleges are expected to "turn over" more than half of their employees during this decade. As these employees leave to focus on other pursuits, factors related to demographics, recruiting, and the maintenance of educational standards will converge to create a challenge of multiple proportions.

Dilemma One: There will be a shortage of professional faculty during the 1990s. Recruiting challenges will result from both demography and the fact that there is no career track leading to community college employment. Many of our two-year institutions will have to scramble to find faculty and key support staff.

Some will pursue their careers beyond reasonable limits and literally die on the job.

In the short-range, community college personnel planners will consider solutions ranging from lowering credentials to using more paraprofessionals to accelerating the applications of teaching technology.

In the longer range, community colleges leaders will emphasize their success in attaining vision, mission and goals. They will do this to enhance their institution's reputation, and then they'll use it as an ace in the recruiting game.

Dilemma Two: Many faculty members will not retire. The demographic forces which create shortages will have reverse political impacts. Here's why: If current legislation is not extended (and that's the most likely scenario), the mandatory retirement age for college faculty will be eliminated. As a result, many will keep on working. Some will pursue their careers beyond reasonable limits and literally die on the job.

While extending careers may help solve the first dilemma, it has potential for creating another. Simultaneously, community colleges may be pursuing new faculty while aggressively searching for incentives which encourage current faculty to leave.

And so a double dilemma pushes questions of quality to a high place on the agenda. In the marketplace there are outstanding candidates for community college positions. These high caliber people must be recruited if community colleges are to maintain and build on a foundation of high standards.

Similarly, many senior faculty have capacity to make continuing contributions. Those who can enthusiastically deliver quality instruction and benefit students with their depth of experience should be permitted to do so.

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But on the campus there are people for whom it is time to move on. It is not a question of chronology. It is not even a question of respect. It is a question of maintaining what our community colleges have come to stand for, the real meaning of professional standards, and our continuing ability to provide quality programming to those who depend on us every day.

Discussion Initiators

- ❑ What is your institution's recruiting plan for the 1990s?
- ❑ How many of your faculty members are nearing retirement, and how many are likely to extend their careers?
- ❑ What process does your institution use to mix new and experienced staff?
- ❑ Is the culture of your institution healthy, or should it be changed through the hiring process?
- ❑ Is there a commonly accepted definition of quality on your campus?

Campus Collegiality

A strong sense of community was a common denominator during the formative years of the comprehensive community college movement. Virtually everyone involved knew the mission and was committed to fulfilling it.

Perhaps this resulted from the zeal of the movement's founders. Perhaps it was the result of a youthfully exuberant staff. Or, perhaps it flowed logically from the sharing that must take place when resources are limited and demands are high.

This sense of ownership in the common good seems to have dissipated over the past two decades. The spirit of togetherness and the exhilaration which results from collectively held goals is reported to be in deteriorated condition on many community college campuses. The reason may have been specific to an individual college, or — more likely — it may have been a reflection of the broader social movement toward individualism and self-interest.

The timing for a collegial renaissance couldn't be better. Campus leaders at all levels should embrace and nurture it.

Now, however, there appears to be a yearning for a return to collegiality. At the center of this revival is renewed interest in and commitment to high standards of teaching, learning and student achievement.

There appear to be some logical reasons for this turnabout. Staff members headed toward retirement may want to leave high-quality teaching as their legacy to the professionals who replace them and the generations of students who will follow.

It may also be that the pendulum is beginning to swing from skill-specific occupational programming back to the liberal arts and the analytical arena of the sciences. In short, institutional preference may be emphasizing **thinking** over **doing** as society comes to appreciate that education and training are both as essential as they are different.

Regardless of the reason, the timing for a collegial renaissance couldn't be better. Campus leaders at all levels should embrace and nurture it.

Collegiality and commitment result from a sense of ownership in the process. The synergistic impact of pulling together for a shared goal was central to the success of the community college movement. It reflected the spirit that created America.

Now we have an opportunity to repeat history on a much grander scale. We have a renewed desire to do better things in better ways. We have a renewed, internally-generated understanding of the value which comes from enlightening our citizenry and capitalizing on change.

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Restoring ownership in the system and renewing the sense of campus community may enhance student achievement more than anything else we can do during this decade.

Discussion Initiators

- ❑ What is the sense of collegiality on your campus, and how has it changed during the past five years?
- ❑ What forces seem to be driving a renewed interest in teaching and learning?
- ❑ What process do you have in place to encourage ownership in the development of higher purpose?
- ❑ Who or what will sustain commitment to high standards and excellence in teaching?
- ❑ What future event will accelerate your capacity to improve student achievement?

Proper Perspectives

"Proper Perspectives" is one of the *Top Ten* issues facing America's public schools. Its impact is also apparent at the community college level. As a result, this issue appears on both the K-12 and community college *Top Ten* lists this year.

A big committee is mustering to run public education. It's composed of business people, lay citizens and legislators. Anyone else who wants to join will probably be welcome.

Left unfocused, this "committee" will accumulate power in excess of anyone's intent. It may also make a mockery of the accountability it seeks.

Decision-making in the decade ahead must be based more on fact than opinion.

Some educators have already abdicated responsibility and given the "committee" authority over the people, programs and priorities which are essential to learning. Others foresee the "committee" as an insurmountable obstacle and are simply deserting the profession.

How is it that a committee might determine educational direction and the methods by which we instruct our students? One answer resides in our governance structure.

Local school boards may be the last political body which people can approach directly to get a hearing and a decision. It is both the blessing and curse of local control that citizen representatives are easily accessible. Sometimes three people appearing before a board look like a ground swell, and that is why people who approach boards often get their way.

As education restructures and reforms, colleges will need a process for change. They will have to take broader soundings. They will have to seek public advice and counsel while helping people understand that a committee composed of everyone cannot be allowed to run things.

Committees don't work under certain conditions. Educational institutions don't either. For example, when everyone is in charge, no one is in charge. And when purpose is unclear and people don't have to live with the consequences of their decisions, there's a nil prognosis for progress.

Proper perspectives are the building blocks of progress. They result from:

- knowing where the institution is headed;
- having a process for getting where you want to go;
- understanding the issues;

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- having adequate decision-making information; and,
- appreciating that collective purpose is more important than individual anything.

Without the proper perspectives, people can change curricula which have taken years to develop . . . and they can force the addition of educational programs without regard to educational methodology or process.

Decision-making in the decade ahead must be based more on *fact* than *opinion*. Objective research coupled with reliable forecasting will become strong contributors to sustaining institutional excellence. Expanding the institution's ability to do both will be a step in the right direction.

Discussion Initiators

- ❑ How can your institution take broader soundings on the campus climate?
- ❑ Does your institution have a proactive process for change?
- ❑ Are programming changes always related to your institution's vision, mission and goals?
- ❑ Do decision-makers have an understanding of critical issues which have potential for impacting your institution?
- ❑ How effectively do you seek and use public advice and counsel?

Ethics

Concern for ethics emerged forcefully on the public agenda at the turn of the decade. Prompted by concerns about societal collapse, we've now begun a value-centered self-examination focused on how yesterday created today, and how we can move from where we are to build a better tomorrow.

What we're learning is disturbing. In our quest to define truth, we are discovering that truth is neither black nor white . . . that good and bad depend on the perspective of the viewer, and that right and wrong are no longer absolutes, but are dependent on the value systems of individuals.

Moral numbness does not foster consistent application of moral principles . . .

Perhaps most importantly, we have come to recognize grave inconsistencies between what we say and what we do. What we espouse as a lasting belief (e.g., excellence in education) isn't consistent with how we behave (e.g., using reward systems that reinforce failure while punishing success). In the context of such disparities, we have begun to question what we stand for.

This sudden uncertainty about decision-making ethics in our two-year institutions (and in society itself) is symptomatic of a larger problem — misunderstandings about ethics. Many are not aware that the application of ethical principles to daily decision-making is dependent upon a hierarchal process:

- First, a system of lasting beliefs (values) must be present.
- Second, existing values must be translated into decisions about what is right and what is wrong (morals).
- Third, methods for applying a mosaic of moral principles (ethics) must be developed.
- Finally, consistently applied moral principles (ethics) must reinforce the system of lasting beliefs (values).

Moral numbness does not foster consistent application of moral principles, and disagreement about ethical standards does not lead to reinforcement of lasting beliefs.

Our concern about ethics focuses on where citizens should receive their ethical grounding. It's widely believed that values develop early in life, and, therefore, are grounded in family behavior. But the traditional family has disintegrated.

Because values can't be legislated or mandated, society is now turning to religious and educational organizations for leadership in values clarification and the development of ethics.

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Look for this issue to manifest itself at the community college level in two ways:

1. There will be debate over the appropriateness of an institutional code of conduct (ethics); and,
2. There will be debate over whether "ethics" has a place in the curriculum.

This is familiar territory for religious organizations; it is less so for community colleges. Nonetheless, it may be past the time to step up to the mark.

Discussion Initiators

- ❑ Does your institution teach ethics?
- ❑ Whose ethics does your institution model at its various levels?
- ❑ What will it take to establish values which support quality education in your community?
- ❑ Are traditional American ethics appropriate for shaping the two-year institution of the future?
- ❑ Does your institution have a formally adopted code of ethical behavior?

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- *The Top Ten Issues Facing America's Colleges (1990 Edition)*
- *The Top Ten Educational Issues (1990 Edition)*
- *The Top Ten Educational Issues (1991 Edition)*
- *The Preparation Gap*
- *The Two Year Institution: Serving Society's Needs*
- *Are You Too Busy To Think?*

These publications and additional copies of *The Top Ten Issues Facing America's Community Colleges* are $5 each (minimum order 10). Contact The Institute for Future Studies, Macomb Community College, 14500 Twelve Mile Road, Warren, MI 48093, 313/445-7242.

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